

The Evolution of Army Leader Development

by

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United States Army War College
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Abstract

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There is a growing chorus of senior military leaders, think tank personnel and students in academic environments that argue that the Army's process for developing strategic leaders is not producing officers that are prepared to operate in the Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational environment. This paper focuses on examining Infantry and Armor progression models and addresses the reasons why the current officer assignment developmental model is contributing to this problem and the cultural underpinnings that perpetuate the problem. This paper offers practical recommendations on the evolution of the officer assignment model in order to provide officers with broadening experiences over time that will develop officers better prepared to operate in the strategic environment.

The Evolution of Army Leader Development

Over the past five years a growing chorus of senior leaders, think tank personnel, and students in academic settings has proclaimed that the Army's process for developing strategic leaders is broken.¹ The common theme is that while the Army is proficient at producing war fighting officers who have demonstrated tactical excellence over the last decade in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army is failing to produce critical and creative thinkers that are prepared to operate at the strategic level as leaders or advisors to strategic leaders. We'll call them "strategic operators," officers serving as strategic leaders of their organizations or senior members on the staff of strategic leaders.

Rather than spending time re-making the argument that there is a problem with the Army's development of strategic operators and suggesting improvements in how the Army develops its officers, this paper will accept the premise that is already widely accepted: the Army does indeed have a problem with the development of strategic operators. I will focus on examining the requirements for building strategic operators, look at why we have this problem in the Army, and offer practical solutions that are feasible within the constructs of our current personnel manning system which has the difficult task of manning the force in a resource constrained environment. I will focus on looking at two branches of the Army: Infantry and Armor. To limit the scope and keep this a manageable project, this paper utilizes data studying Armor officers in detail. Data collected in this paper is based on reviewing officer files from Year Groups (YG) 1991-1995. Files were assessed during mock board procedures in accordance with the procedures used within the Department of the Army Secretariat for board procedures.²

Since 2008 Infantry and Armor officer development and command selection have merged into virtually the same process. Both branches compete for the same slots and are virtually interchangeable as seen by the Army with the exception being there are a limited number of light Infantry assignments that an Armor officer cannot fill.³ Infantry and Armor are selected as the focus of this paper for three reasons. The first is to keep the scope small enough to conduct a study in detail that allows a careful examination of the data when looking at board results and selection rates for promotion, and more critically, command selection. Second, Infantry and Armor represent the most glaring problem for the Army with regards to joint qualification. Both branches are below ten percent in terms of the number of joint qualified majors and lieutenant colonels despite the fact that these officers commanded the vast majority of maneuver units in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan over the past ten years and as such are strong candidates for continued service as strategic operators. The third reason is that Infantry and Armor officers represent 95% of the Army's tactical brigade commanders commanding 41 of 43 tactical brigades, 72% of the Army's Division Commanders commanding 8 of 11 Divisions, 100% of the Army's Corps commanders and are the only branches with general officers serving as combatant commanders.⁴ The numbers suggest that these two branches represent a considerable portion of the Army's pool of future strategic operators.

Building Strategic Leaders

When addressing the issue of developing strategic leaders, there is no defined answer to what competencies are required to make such a leader. Recent studies by Rand, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and The Center for a New American Society have identified common threads in defining the competencies of a

strategic operator. Common traits include the following: critical, creative and innovative thinking; negotiation and consensus building skills; self-awareness; and communication skills.⁵ Synthesis of various studies reveals that ultimately the development of strategic leaders is driven by multiple factors. Cognitive ability, personality, and experience all contribute to the development of strategic operators. Of these factors, cognitive ability is repeatedly shown to be the greatest indicator of performance.⁶ Assessing an officer's cognitive ability as screening criteria for assignments and promotions is limited to a review of the officer's undergraduate and graduate degrees when a selection board meets for the officer's year group. The Army's professional military education plays a critical role in the development of strategic operators and represents the best start point for adding measurements of an officer's cognitive ability.

Beyond education and cognitive ability, the most direct way that the Army can impact the development of strategic operators is through manipulating the experiences that an officer has through the assignment process. A 2011 study conducted at Cornell University found that accumulated experience was a strong predictor of strategic thinking competency and highlighted the importance of novel experiences to the development of strategic leader competencies.⁷ A separate 2011 study conducted by the RAND Corporation concluded the following: "the best preparation for service in a Joint, Interagency Intergovernmental and Multinational (JIIM) context was something different...having to work in an unfamiliar context where success or failure rested on the voluntary collaboration of individuals from different organizational or national cultures." The study also states that any job that forces an officer out of the narrow focus of their

branch or functional area makes a major contribution to developing key, knowledge, skills and abilities required in a JIIM domain.⁸

Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (DA Pam 600-3) outlines a career progression model for officers that identifies key developmental jobs for officers within their branch as well as “broadening” jobs that provide an officer with additional experiences that will assist his development. DA PAM 600-3 defines broadening as developmental positions that provide exposure to experiences outside the officer’s core branch or functional area competencies.⁹ Broadening assignments develop a wider range of knowledge and skills, augment understanding of the full spectrum of Army missions, promote practical application of language training or increase cross cultural exposure, and expand officer awareness of other governmental agencies, units or environments.¹⁰ All broadening jobs do not provide the officer with the same experience and some provide significantly greater exposure to experiences outside of the officer’s normal basic branch and in some cases completely outside of the military.

The Army’s Human Resources Command is in the process of refining the definition of broadening into the following categories; Functional, Institutional, Academia and Civilian Enterprise and JIIM. These categories are not defined in DA PAM 600-3 and will vary by grade, but examples of each category follow: Functional broadening includes jobs such as observer controllers at Combat Training Centers, small group instructors at Army schools and operations officers. Examples of Institutional Broadening jobs include doctrine writers, plans officers and speech writers. Examples of Academia and Civilian jobs include fellowships, training with industry, U.S. Military Academy staff/faculty and Reserve Officer Training Corps Professor of Military Science.

Examples of JIIM broadening jobs include geographic/functional Combatant Command/Joint Staff, Office of the Secretary of Defense Staff and White House and Congressional Fellowships. In theory, the DA PAM 600-3 model is that an officer completes an assignment in a key and developmental (KD) job and then moves to a broadening assignment. This is the model but broadening assignments are often bypassed by officers in order to allow additional time in the tactical environment. Broadening assignments are also not managed to ensure that officers who demonstrate superior performance to their peers are assigned to the broadening assignments that will potentially provide them with the greatest opportunities for growth. Those are assignments in academic settings or the JIIM environment. These jobs offer the greatest chance for growth in a new environment requiring different competencies and represent the ideal start point for developing future strategic operators.¹¹

Armor and Infantry officers have traditionally had a very narrow path to success. This paper defines success as selection for battalion command. Battalion command is the gate for selection for Senior Service College (SSC) and as graduates, the officers become the colonels who will serve on the staffs of strategic leaders and remain competitive for future selections. The path these successful officers take is heavily focused on time in tactical assignments where the officer demonstrates his ability and is given officer evaluation reports that consistently numerically rank him among the top 10% of his peers. I want to ensure that I am absolutely clear in stating that the most important thing for Armor or Infantry officers to do is demonstrate that they are capable of performing in their KD tactical assignments at a very high level. These officers lead America's sons and daughters into combat and if they can only be good at one thing it

must be war fighting at the tactical level. Performance in key developmental jobs is now and should remain the most important factor in determining future selection for promotion and command opportunities.

But Army officers are extremely talented and they are not one dimensional, one trick ponies who can only excel when assigned at the tactical level. Where the Army fails today is in not managing the timelines of officers well enough to enable them to get through their KD jobs, prove themselves there, and move on to broadening assignments that will expand their experiential boundaries and expose them to other parts of the Army or the JIIM environment. In addition to developing these officers personally and professionally, these broadening assignments may also provide valuable insight into which of these officers have the potential to go on and continue excelling beyond the level of battalion command. I make this assessment because how well they perform in broadening assignments away from the tactical arena will more than likely portend to success as strategic operators.

The deployed environment of the last decade has presented officers with a variety of ill-defined problems that have challenged officers from second lieutenant to general. Combat has forced officers to operate in a gray world where volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous problems are the norm. But the past ten years are not the norm and we cannot depend on combat as a training solution for preparing officers for the future. In a normal garrison environment officers operate in a world where the problems are relatively well defined and the structure they operate within lends itself to supporting the officer in charge. In a garrison environment, officers construct training plans that are solidified and resourced a full month in advance. Once the training is

planned there is a systemic eight step process that provides structure and certainty of success in the operation. In garrison, officers live in a structured environment with a chain of command that is well established. It is the expectation that an operations order received from a higher headquarters will provide the 5Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) and a clear understanding of the left and right limits the officer must work within.

Strategic operators operate in a different world where the ill-defined problem is the norm. Strategic operators operate in an environment where there may be no operations order or guidance given at all. The problems encountered typically have no boundaries, no timeline associated with them and limited access to the boss to get further clarity (assuming he could provide it). The amount of time to present recommendations to the problem can range from hours to weeks and the experience of the team that is working the problem can vary widely. The structure of the team is likely not designed to support the individual officer; he is simply another team member that is expected to contribute to the overall effort. In this environment, the officer must rely on a different set of competencies such as critical and creative thinking, negotiation and consensus building, self-awareness and communication skills.¹² While these competencies are not completely absent in the tactical environment, the officer can successfully accomplish his mission without relying on them.

With regards to officer development, there is a cultural problem within Infantry and Armor branches. Our culture is one that says that the key to building a future battalion commander is to get as much “muddy boots” time as possible. Indeed, recent board results support this with the average time spent in KD jobs for majors selected for battalion command being 27 months over the last five years, despite the fact that the

requirement from DA PAM 600-3 is for 12-24 months.¹³ It appears that the belief among the force is that if you don't get an officer a great deal of KD time you place him at risk for selection to battalion command. Results of recent boards show this is true. But this is not the complete story. The belief that boards reward muddy boots time is looking at the results very shallowly. What the boards are rewarding is performance that results in Officer Evaluation Reports (OERs) that are clearly enumerating officers as being within the top 10% of their population. This is a statement that many may disagree with, so I will explain it in greater detail.

Over the past five years, officers selected for battalion command have approximately the same amount of KD time as those not selected.¹⁴ The results show that the officers selected have more above center mass (ACOM) reports and more ACOM reports enumerating them within the top ten percent of the population they are rated against. The key is not what you find when looking at the reports of the officers selected but rather what you do not find when looking at the officers not selected. The officers not selected do not have a commensurate number of ACOM reports in non-KD jobs. They have fewer ACOM reports in their file overall and the ones they have are generally not well enumerated, having either no enumeration or vague percentages. Officers not selected also have significantly more center of mass reports throughout their file. Of course this seems obvious but here is the point: it is not the time spent in the KD job that matters; it is the enumerated ACOM OERs. If we had officers serving only 12-24 months in KD jobs that left with strongly enumerated reports, went on to broadening assignments and continued to get strongly enumerated ACOM reports *but*

were not selected for Centralized Selection List (CSL) command, then we could argue that a lack of the “extra” KD time hurt these officers. That is not the case.

On the surface it appears that selecting officers that have slugged it out with their boots in the mud is rewarding them for doing the “tough” jobs. I argue the opposite. Time in a brigade combat team (BCT) as a battalion or brigade S3 or XO is as demanding as it is rewarding and the job is not easy. But once you have proven yourself as a high quality officer within the organization, it is also an extremely safe place for an officer to be. The more time an officer spends in the BCT, the more great reports he will get. If an officer gets an initial report placing him within the top four in the BCT, chances are, additional time in the BCT will lead to him holding his position at number four or moving up a notch or two. The absolute safest thing the officer can do to assure himself of additional highly enumerated ACOM reports in the future is to stay put. The longer the officer stays, the more comfortable he gets. It is arguable that the third and fourth ACOM OERs in the BCT will likely be the strongest ones the officer has in his file despite the fact that he is probably having an easier time doing his job than ever before. Is he working hard and carrying a heavy load? Absolutely, but he does not have the challenge of leaving his comfort zone and stepping into an unknown environment with different rules where he may not be one of the heavy hitters on the team. This officer has taken very little career risk and we will reward him for it.

The officer who leaves the BCT after 24 months and steps into a new job, on the other hand, is accepting risk. If the officer has had success on his first two reports and has ACOM reports that place him in the top 25%, the officer, based on an average selection rate of 24%, for the past five battalion command boards, is very competitive

for selection for battalion command.¹⁵ His challenge, and one of the things that we should pay attention to as an Army, is that it is likely going to be much tougher for him to move into a new job, re-establish himself and ascend to the top of the new boss' OML to get an enumerated ACOM on his next report. This officer is accepting considerable career risk in moving to a job outside of his comfort zone. If this officer receives an enumerated ACOM report in his follow on broadening assignment the board will likely rate him as well as his peers. This officer has the tougher path but a path that, depending on the job he goes into (generating force, JIIM, etc), will ultimately produce an officer with a skill set and diversity of experience that is better preparing him to operate in the future JIIM environment. The Army must encourage more officers to take this path and mitigate the risk for them.

The Current Model

DA PAM 600-3, the Army's officer management regulation, does not make the importance of broadening assignments clear to officers. A review of chapters nine and ten of DA PAM 600-3, which cover Infantry and Armor progression models for officers, shows great emphasis placed on the importance of the KD jobs at the BCT level but offers little on the importance of jobs outside of the BCT or very short paragraphs explaining that they are important too. Our regulation that is designed to lay out the development model for officers fails to explain these things in enough detail and it does nothing to connect the dots and help officers understand the "so what" associated with broadening jobs that are to most young officers, distracters that are keeping them away from troops. The officer progression model for AR officers is below (Figure 1).

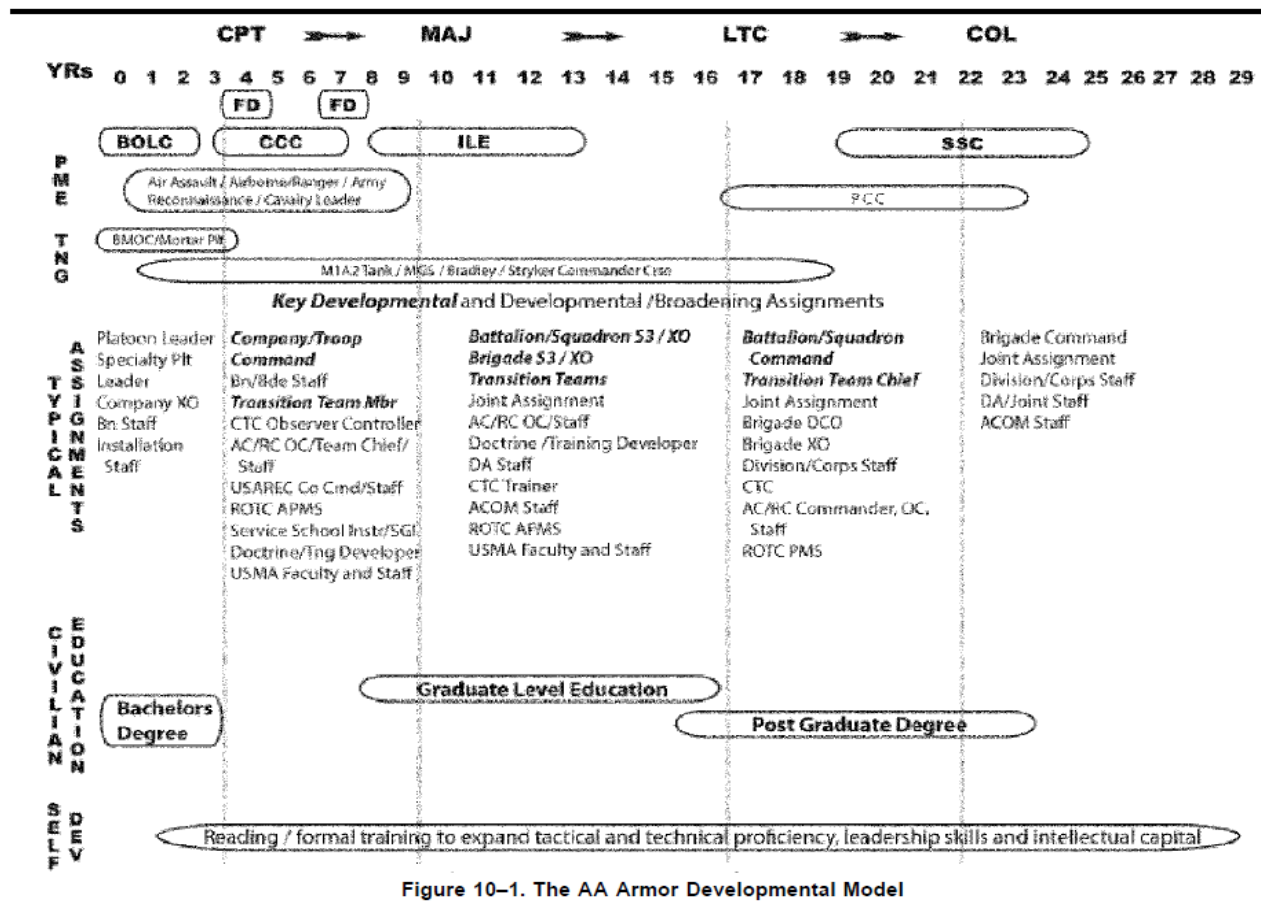


Figure 10-1. The AA Armor Developmental Model

Figure 1. Armor Branch Life Cycle Model

The model pictures what is not so clearly articulated in DA PAM 600-3. The word picture in DA PAM 600-3 is that it is all about the KD time, platoon leader, company command, S3/XO and battalion command. For each block of time carved out for the KD jobs there is an extensive section explaining why it matters. For the non-KD blocks there is very little. Early in an officer's military career we must ensure they understand that the key to long term successful development is demonstrating the ability to excel in both the traditional tactical environment and a JIIM environment.

Talent Management?

Here is where the talent management discussion starts. Consider captains first. A brigade commander ranks his officers when OERs are due. The brigade commander,

through discussion with his battalion commanders can make recommendations to the career manager at Human Resources Command (HRC) on potential opportunities that he feels may best suit individual officers. There are no cookie cutter solutions to talent management or officer progression that will end with everyone having the same opportunities or experiences. Everyone will not get a trophy or if they do, they may not all be the same type of trophy. For a variety of reasons to include manning constraints, resource constraints, limited numbers of some key broadening jobs and educational opportunities, we have to acknowledge that we cannot provide every officer the same experience. The job of explaining to the officer where he fits and why he was recommended for a “less desirable” job versus the White House Fellowship that he wanted lies with the commander when he counsels the officer.

Commanders get a vote and rank their officers with the intent of identifying those individuals that clearly have strong potential for excellence at the next level and are potentially future battalion commanders. But the OER is based on the officer’s performance for the past rating period. The commander’s number one rated tactical war fighter may not be the best guy to send for a White House Fellowship or he may not have the grades required to get into graduate school at Harvard. But based on his demonstrated potential, the branch manager can still find the right career progressing job for the officer. This is not a computerized system. Successful assignments require dialogue and the commander owes this to his subordinate officers. The commander has the ability to talk in detail about the attributes of his officers and he has the ability to look deeper and see officers that may not have made the top of his OML but have specific

talents that are of value to the Army and also interest the officer. He can also provide an objective perspective that may not be present in a Green Pages narrative.¹⁶

The same thing should occur with majors, but it is even more important here. While not 100% the case, when a BCT commander rates his majors he is casting his vote for who will be a battalion commander. Officers who receive two strongly enumerated ACOMs should do one of two things, move up to take a BCT level job or leave the organization in order to move into a career enhancing broadening job that will potentially put the officer on a better path to being a strategic operator. Officers receiving more than 24 months of KD time, even if they are in a BCT level job, must understand the requirement to get a broadening assignment.

Goldwater Nichols Constraints

The implementation of the Goldwater Nichols Act of 1986 had a significant and useful impact on the services.¹⁷ A forcing function was required to help the services gain a better understanding of how we each worked and how to work with each other, but over time there has been an unintended consequence caused by Goldwater Nichols that has hampered the Army in utilizing what should be one of our greatest tools for broadening officers.

The Goldwater Nichols Act requires each branch of service to assign a prescribed number of officers to work in joint assignments. “Hard coded” Joint Duty Assignment List (JDAL) jobs are jobs that award immediate joint credit and are extremely valuable in terms of immersing an officer into an environment where he is forced to learn about operations beyond the scope of the Army.¹⁸ Developmentally, these are arguably among the most important types of assignments available to the Army in large scale to assist in the development of future strategic operators. Rather

than maximizing this opportunity to develop talent and posture officers for future success, the Army has failed to consistently use this as an avenue for the officers that Army boards are selecting as its best-officers selected for command. If we look over the last five years, on average less than 15% of officers selected for brigade command have served in a JDAL coded job.¹⁹ Post battalion command, among the top officers who are competitive for BCT command (based on strength of file and their battalion command reports), very few are placed in a JDAL coded assignment.

This is a critical time for our Army to make a decision about the future of officers that have demonstrated that even among a highly selective group (former battalion commanders) they have excelled and have the potential to serve above the level of colonel. But these officers, the best of our best battalion commanders, are rarely targeted for joint assignments after battalion command. The primary reason is timing and not an overt desire to avoid joint assignments. The assignment officers at HRC are not selection boards but they do have the ability to evaluate the strength of a file of officers within their population and can identify officers who are highly competitive for selection on the next CSL board. If an assignment officer identifies an officer that has a strong chance for selection for BCT command, the assignment officer will look closely at the officer's timeline and chart three key dates/windows. The first date is the officer's projected change of command date from his current job as a battalion commander. This date, plus 30 days marks the date that he can reasonably expect to have the officer start his next job. The next date that the assignment officer will look at is when does this officer go before the CSL board and what is the window for the available commands if the officer is selected for brigade level CSL command. The next window of time the

assignment officer looks at is the Senior Service College (SSC) window. The assignment officer recognizes that the officer must complete SSC before assuming command. This is guidance from the Army Chief of Staff. When all of these things are overlaid, the assignment officer has a difficult time assigning an officer to a joint assignment because he fears that the officer may be forced to either defer command if he is selected or request a waiver to leave a JDAL assignment and not receive automatic credit towards joint qualification for time already served.²⁰

It is difficult for the assignment officer to make the numbers work with regards to time available to get the officer from one assignment to the next with the constraints identified above and this is without considering additional personal constraints that are weighed for every officer individually (such as the school year for the kids). These constraints make it difficult to get highly competitive former battalion commanders into joint assignments.

Before going any further, it is important to offer a note of realism. Any solutions offered to address this issue must pass the feasibility, acceptability, and suitability test. They must be feasible, acceptable, and suitable when presented to the Army G1 and the Commander of Officer Personnel Management Division at HRC. HRC has constraints. There are more personnel authorizations than there are available personnel to fill them and this will get worse in the future as the Army downsizes. There is no wiggle room for HRC and there are no officers sitting on the bench available to shift around at their leisure. For this reason this paper does not offer idealist ideas like sending everyone to graduate school, sabbaticals or even developing a system where we identify every individual officer's special hidden talent. Any solution offered must be

realistic in terms of HRC being able to actually execute the program while still meeting the demands of commanders across the Army who still have a mission to execute.

Recommendations

There is no panacea that enables us to build the perfect strategic operator. Even if we provide an officer with an exceptional civilian education and allow time for him to do an assignment in a JIIM assignment, there is no guarantee that he will emerge after 20 years of service as a strong strategic operator. There are too many variables at play. What we can do is develop an approach to career management that allows us to do the following: 1) Begin identifying officers early that are performing at a level above their peers and provide those officers with career progressing jobs with broadening experiences that we believe will shape them for future operations in a strategic environment, and 2) Provide more officers, even those outside of the top 10%, with additional opportunities to serve in broadening assignments that shape them the same way.

Successful implementation starts with changes to policy. Start correcting this problem by adjusting the language in DA PAM 600-3 to highlight that the officer we are attempting to develop is an officer described in these pages: an officer with a diverse background who demonstrates the ability to excel in a variety of environments. Being competitive for battalion command should mean having a diverse file. Time in an academia/civilian enterprise or JIIM broadening assignment should be a discriminator for selection to O-6, SSC and O-6 level command, but not a disqualifier. Every officer will not have the same experiences and we will still have officers with exceptional files that are not afforded the opportunity to serve in a broadening assignment at each level. These officers should be the exception. DA PAM 600-3 is reviewed annually and these

changes are required if the Army is serious about making an impact. In making the changes in DA PAM 600-3, over time, the Army will make this the new norm and send a message to the force that it's okay to leave the BCT.

Manage talent at the O-3 level by prioritizing academic, civilian and JIIM broadening assignments and assigning the top performing captains to fill these slots. This is already occurring at some level within HRC but the process can be better. Part of identifying the top performers is adding additional stratification to the block checks for captains' OERs. Identifying the top 49% leaves the boards to interpret the OER instead of allowing the brigade commander to make a clear statement. Officers achieving a top block (assume 25%) on at least one company command OER would be automatically eligible to compete for academic, civilian and JIIM broadening assignments. Officers achieving an OER placing them in the top 26-49% are automatically eligible to compete for assignments in academic and civilian broadening assignments and can compete for JIIM assignments with an endorsement from their brigade commander. Officers who are not in the top 49% will normally receive assignments in functional and institutional broadening assignments but may compete for academic, civilian and JIIM assignments with brigade commander endorsement. This does not suggest that only officers in the bottom 51% will go into institutional and functional broadening assignments. Not every officer that is in that top 25% category can or will want to go into an academic, civilian or JIIM assignment. Personal preferences, Family situations and brigade commander input will help the assignment officers determine the right fit for the right officer. This is important for two reasons. First, it provides space for officers that may not have received ratings in the top 25% to

still compete for highly desirable positions that are personally rewarding for the officer and maintain their positive outlook on the Army. The second reason is that since not every officer who finished in the top 25% is the right fit for a JIIM job or graduate school, we will still have high quality officers serving as instructors, observer controllers, doctrine writers, etc in functional and institutional broadening assignments. But the Army must state clearly to the force that we want our most competitive officers competing for the opportunity to take an assignment in the Academic/Civilian/JIIM environment.

The same logic applies for majors. Again, knowledge of the individual officer's timeline is critical and assignment officers must communicate early to the officer's commander the intent for the officer and why it is necessary to move one of his best out of the BCT at 21 months versus 30. Finding the right job in a JIIM environment for post KD majors is the goal of the assignment officer and we must communicate to the community that we are looking for our best officers to represent the Army in these jobs. The new norm must become that the path to battalion command must travel through an academic, civilian or JIIM assignment.

Lieutenant colonels have traditionally been among the toughest to broaden for the reasons stated earlier with regards to the timeline for competitive officers, completion of SSC, and the window for available commands. The strategic communication to the force must be that the Army is looking for the best and brightest former battalion commanders to represent the Army in the JIIM environment. Within the lieutenant colonel ranks, we need more former battalion commanders serving in joint assignments before SSC. I stated earlier that there are constraints, but it is not

impossible, and again, it is not the same for every officer. Figure 2 below shows a potential timeline for a YG '90 officer and the ability to get him into a joint assignment, through SSC and on to assume a brigade level command if selected.

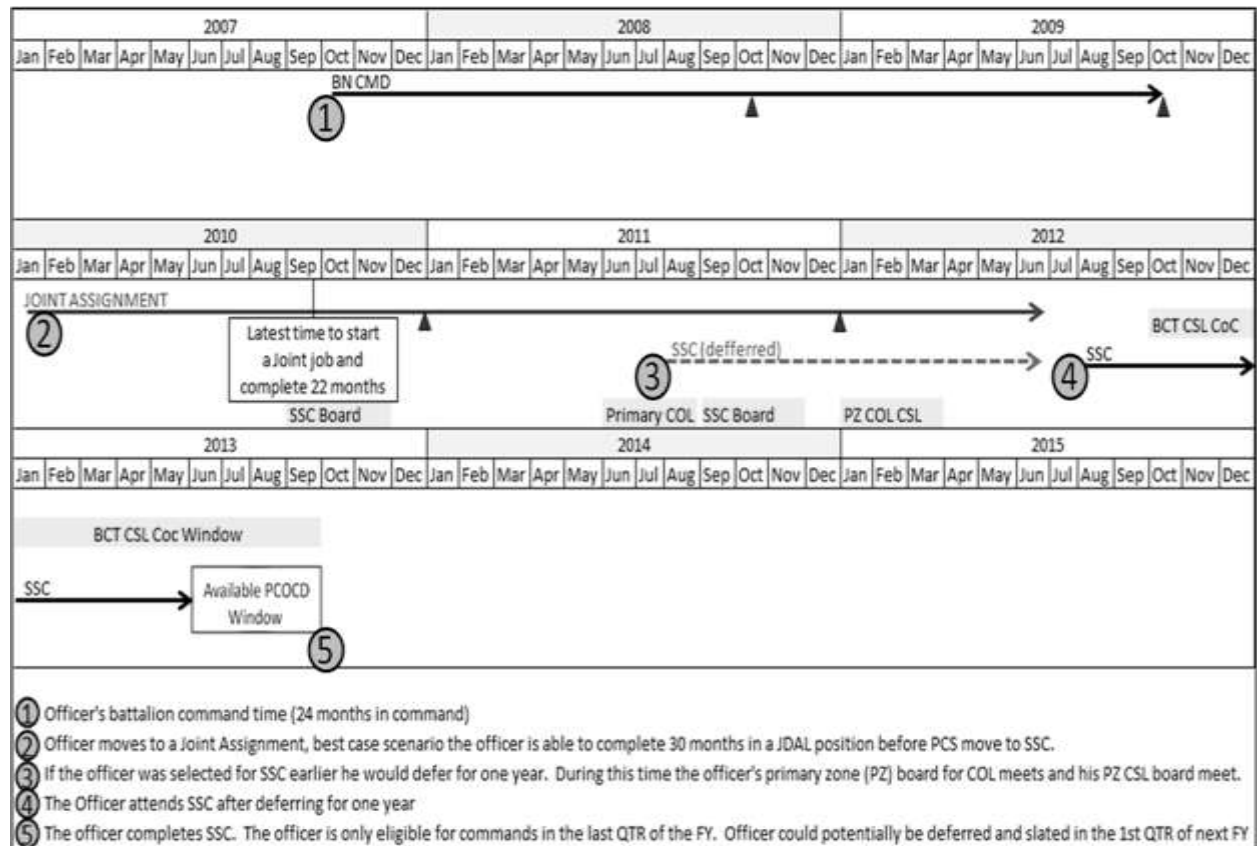


Figure 2. Notional O-5 Timeline

There are drawbacks to this scenario. The first is that officers who assume command of a battalion after August of a calendar year do not have enough time to complete 22 months in a joint assignment. The second is that for some, this scenario may involve mid-year or off cycle moves.

Re-define KD complete to mean completion of 18-24 months of time in a tactical assignment and 18-24 months in a broadening assignment. This is achievable and it is required in order for the individual officer to make it a priority. If

broadening assignments become the norm, and a requirement, then officers will not work so hard to avoid them. It also sends a clear message to the force that we expect more from our officers than simply being able to operate in a tactical environment.

In all cases, captains, majors and lieutenant colonels, we must back up the message to the field with the language in our instructions for selection boards. I stated earlier that the safest way to battalion command for a major serving in a BCT is for him to stay in place where the likelihood of continuing to receive great OERs is high. We have to break the paradigm here and demonstrate that as an Army we will reward the officer who demonstrates the ability to excel in multiple environments with tactical experience being only part of the equation. The guidance to the board should clearly state that officers who have very strong overall files should not be penalized by a center of mass report in a joint assignment on their initial report. The Army must direct selection boards to evaluate the total file and consider anomalies that are out of character with the officer's overall file before voting. The conditions are different and the challenges for the officer to arrive in a new organization and excel are greater. But it should be clear to the board that these are the officers that we want and that we need for our future Army.

Formalize Battalion/Brigade commander consultation with assignment officers to shape assignments for their officers. The OER tells part of the story but a commander's input into the personality and specific attributes of an officer can be crucial in placing officers. Commanders know when they are forecasted to lose officers. Six months prior to assignment the commander must have a dialogue with the

assignment officer to assist in the assignment officer's file assessment and determination of assignment.

The Army should establish goals for the branches to meet with regards to the percentage of joint qualified majors and lieutenant colonels in the branch.

Including colonels skews the numbers because we have to assign colonels somewhere and routinely send colonels to joint assignments after SSC. The real measure of whether a branch is improving is in the percentage of joint qualified majors and lieutenant colonels. Mandate the percentage and the branches will achieve it. I don't offer a percentage because it takes a panoramic picture of requirements versus inventory to set this number, but it must get above the current lowly single digit numbers we now have in Armor and Infantry branches.

Allocate slots for Infantry and Armor captains to attend graduate school after completion of the captain's career course. There are currently zero Advanced Civil Schooling slots funded by the Army for Infantry and Armor Branches. Yet, these branches are and will continue producing a high percentage of our Army's senior leaders and commanding our largest formations. The number could be modest to start but it should be higher than zero. As a workaround, the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) has started a pilot program where officers stay at Fort Benning after completing the career course and complete a master's degree. Much of this is accomplished on the officer's own time after he completes class. This is a valiant effort on the part of the MCOE but it is not a systemic fix to the problem. The Army must make an investment in its future leaders and allocate slots for attendance at top universities with a range of masters producing programs.

Leverage branch proponents to drive the message home and assist in prying officers out of assignments in order to get them broadened. From captain to lieutenant colonel there are routine battles occurring where commanders want to hold on to “their guy” a little longer. For the good of the Army and the individual officer we have to have the conversations with those commanders to let the officers go. As a general officer, the branch proponent has more horsepower than the branch chief and the proponent owns responsibility for the long term health of the branch so he should be a player in ensuring that we are getting the right officers to the right place at the right time.

Conclusion

I will close by again stating that there are no silver bullets that allow us to produce strategic operators. Developing strategic operators takes years and we can't expect SSC to program how an officer thinks and interacts with people in one short year, after 20 years of hardwiring. We must start earlier with a development model that offers officers a variety of experiences that will shape how they approach problems, interact with people, and operate in vague and unfamiliar environments. We cannot change how we produce officers without a gradual cultural change and these do not occur overnight. But the initial changes can occur quickly with what are relatively simple suggestions for altering the Army's current officer management program for Armor and Infantry officers. The new norm should be junior officers that complete company command excited about moving into a broadening assignment because they understand that this is part of what makes them a good officer and more valuable to the organization. It also gives them something different and potentially assists in identifying a new direction for the balance of their career. Majors should approach their KD time

with the understanding that becoming branch qualified means completion of tactical KD time and completion of a broadening assignment with the best officers selected for JIIM and academic/civilian broadening assignments. The most competitive post command battalion commanders should go into a joint assignment. If these officers are indeed fortunate enough to be selected for brigade command, the Army will ask and expect a lot from them when their command time is complete. We should prepare them. The Army is loaded with talent and with minor modifications to the assignment mentality the culture will evolve and lead to the development of the strategic operators the Army requires.

Endnotes

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